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THE MINISTRY
OF
CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

BY
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THE one definite object of the American Tract Society is to spread the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by means of the printed page. Apart from the oral word, there is no means of spreading the Gospel so potent as the printed page. It is a significant fact that the printing press was invented shortly before the Reformation, and that since its invention evangelical truth has spread rapidly and widely. But notwithstanding the fact that a stupendous work has been done by Christian literature it is true that its usefulness has not been recognized. As one of the speakers of the World Missionary Conference stated: "Emphasis has been placed upon all lines of missionary service, and all have been well supported except the Christian Literature Branch. This has hobbled along in the rear like a half-starved horse."

The results of this neglect are apparent. Not only are the unconverted masses unreached, but even in the Church religious reading is neglected. The vicious sects have detected this weakness and are taking advantage of it. Their literature propaganda the world over has been highly successful, so that the Church may well ask the question, Is not the success of the heretical sects a chastisement to the Christian Church for neg-

lecting to spread abroad sound Biblical literature?

But if error can achieve such great results, how much more will Truth succeed. It is related of the late General Lew Wallace that one day he met Colonel Ingersoll on a New York Central Railroad train. He called the Colonel's attention to the fact that his "Mistakes of Moses" and kindred writings were being taken seriously by many young men, with the result that they were traveling a downward course. Colonel Ingersoll became angry, and a heated discussion followed. On departing from the train, General Wallace said: "I am now going home to write a book, and for every young man your writings have led astray I shall save one hundred," and he wrote "Ben Hur." The "Mistakes of Moses" are forgotten, but "Ben Hur" lives from generation to generation, an illustration showing that truth thrives better than error.

That God has used Christian literature in greatly extending the Kingdom is a fact of history. There are six books known as the "Precious Chain of Books," by which thousands and tens of thousands of souls have been converted and the work of these books is going on in the world at this time.

Years ago an old Puritan, Doctor Richard Sibbes, wrote a book called the "Bruised Reed," which fell just at the right time into the hands of Richard Baxter, and

brought him under the enlightening power of the Spirit of God; Baxter's ministry became like the sun in his strength, and he wrote a book called "The Call to the Unconverted," which continued to speak long after Baxter himself had ceased to speak with human tongue. That "Call to the Unconverted" went on preaching until it fell into the hands of Philip Doddridge, and was the means of bringing him to a deeper experience of the things of God.

Afterward, Doddridge wrote a book called "The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul" which, just at a critical period in his history, fell into the hands of William Wilberforce, who wrote a book called "Practical Christianity," which exerted a powerful influence on the higher classes of Englishmen.

Far down in the Isle of Wight, "Practical Christianity" fired the heart of a clergyman, who has attained, in connection with the Tract Societies, perhaps the widest reputation of all—for who has not heard of Legh Richmond? He wrote the simple annals of a Methodist girl, under the name of "The Dairyman's Daughter," and it would be interesting to know into how many languages this tract has been translated, and how it has been made of God a power for the spread of the truth.

The same book on "Practical Christianity" went down into a secluded parish in Scotland, found there a young minister who

was preaching a Gospel he did not understand, and instructed him in the way of God more perfectly, so that he came forth a champion valiant for the truth until all Scotland rang with the eloquence of Thomas Chalmers. Look at it! Not a flaw in the chain—Richard Sibbes, Richard Baxter, Philip Doddridge, William Wilberforce, Legh Richmond, Thomas Chalmers.

It has been one of the inestimable services rendered by the American Tract Society that it has circulated broadcast millions of copies of the writings of Doddridge, Wilberforce, Legh Richmond and other devoted authors, whose words have taken deep root and borne rich fruit in countless human hearts.

God makes providential uses of the printed page. A young Frenchman who had been wounded at the siege of Saint Quentin was languishing in the hospital when a tract that lay on the coverlet caught his eye. He read it and was converted by it. You may see the monument of that man before the Church of the Consistory in Paris, standing with a Bible in his hand. He is known in history as Admiral Coligny, the leader of the Reformation in France. But the tract had not yet finished its work. It was read by Coligny's nurse, a "sister of mercy," who penitently placed it in the hands of the Lady Abbess, and she, too, was converted by it. She fled from France to the Palatinate, where she met a young Hollander

and became his wife. Her influence reached out into the entire continent of Europe, for her husband was William of Orange. "How far yon little candle threw its beams!" Who knows what the power of the hundredth tract may be? This one tract went out for the healing of several nations.

A young woman by the name of Louise Howard received the call to be a missionary. She took an excellent course of training, but a few months prior to her graduation she was taken sick. The physician disclosed to her the fact that she would not recover. To her devoted friend, who was also her nurse, a Miss Mary Palmer, she gave for a keepsake a book she had compiled herself. It was a collection of Scripture verses called "Heavenly Light on Earthly Pathways," and in it Louise had pasted beautiful poems, inspiring words of great writers and rare old hymns. "It is a condensed Bible, Mary," said Louise, as she gave the book to her friend, "I really believe an ignorant person could get all the light needed to guide him to heaven."

Two years after Louise Howard had gone away from the earth, Miss Palmer was the companion of a wealthy invalid traveling abroad. In Egypt, one day as she stood before an old temple, she was startled when a brown hand was laid on the betassled head of her donkey, and a voice said: "Please, my lady." He began very eagerly

asking if he could not buy, borrow or beg something in English. He wished to qualify more thoroughly as a guide. The bell of the boat rang loudly, in token of speedy departure. She hurriedly gave him that book of her friend Louise Howard. "I will send it where she could not go herself," she said to herself.

Years later she received a foreign letter with a queer pale-green stamp. It brought her the news that the young Mohammedan to whom she had given the book had become converted by it, and, although bitterly persecuted, had started schools and missions in various places, and, now that he is dead, his unfinished task is being carried on by a younger brother. Thus Louise Howard by means of the printed page became a missionary to a benighted people.

God uses literature as a means of salvation where other means fail. In the beautiful cemetery at Lissabon you may find a grave with the epitaph, "Forgiveness, Life, Glory." The story behind this inscription is this: An army captain in the last stages of consumption was being brought to northern Africa to ease his condition. Another officer accompanied him, saying he would not part from him until he had reached his destination. Neither men were religious. The captain did not even wish to be spoken to on the subject of religion. But his friend knew he had but a short time to live and ought to

be prepared. He purchased a book, the title of which was, "Forgiveness, Life, Glory." This book accomplished its purpose. It brought remission of sin and the blessed hope of immortality.

In Oregon, in 1913, a missionary colporter of the American Tract Society, visited a most notorious infidel. He gave him some tracts and a book of Sermons by Dr. David J. Burrell. Several months afterward the colporter learned to his great joy that the hardened sinner had come to Christ.

What the Christian world needs to-day is to be flooded with sound, evangelical literature. Missionary colportage reaches all classes of men everywhere. In point of expense it is the cheapest way of spreading the Gospel and the results are most gratifying. It is the colporter to-day who goes out into the highways and hedges, and only eternity will reveal the greatness of this work.

If you are sincerely desirous of saving souls, then use tracts, pamphlets and books. Read, study them, pray over them, and make it your life habit to give "leaves of healing" to those who need them. Become a reader of Christian literature yourself, and thus heighten the enjoyment, strength and usefulness of your life.

AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY

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New York, N. Y.